Virginia

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Tobacco

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A Chapter in America's Industrial Growth

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ut the colonial period the single staple of ominated the economic, social, legislative and religious life of Virginia. Starting early in the national period new elements in commerce and agriculture began to alter the structure of Virginia's one-crop economy. The highlights of the long, sometimes dramatic history which began at Jamestown are presented in this booklet. Included is a brief account of current activities of the tobacco industry in Virginia. Today the production of considerable quantities of leaf and of tobacco goods gives employment to a large labor force in the state. Auction warehouses, factories, storage sheds and other plants and facilities represent an impressive capital investment. More than 30,000 outlets in Virginia serve consumers who annually buy tobacco products of which the latest estimated wholesale value was over 109 million dollars. Tobacco remains what it has always been in the Old Dominion's history: a commodity of great economic, social, and fiscal importance.

Tobacco History Series

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Virginia and Tobacco

When the *Elizabeth*, Captain Adams master, reached England about July 20, 1613 after a three-weeks' passage from Virginia, she had on board a small consignment of tobacco. The tobacco had been experimentally grown in 1612 on John Rolfe's little farm at Jamestown.

That consignment—the cream of a first crop—could not have been more than a few hundred pounds. Yet, though the shipment was tiny, the effects of that exportation were far-reaching—"of momentous importance," in the opinion of various historians. For the new Virginia leaf met enthusiastic consumer acceptance in a particularly rich market. That resulted in the economic salvation of the colony, firmly established a British outpost in the New World, and developed a commerce that was long the most valuable in Britain's overseas trade.

Because the planting was experimental and cleared land still scarce, Rolfe's first harvest of a tobacco type new in Virginia came from only a small plot. Within a few decades after that successful initial crop, green fields of tall tobacco plants were extending the colony's boundaries westward and southward.

Virginia's current tobacco production

The green fields are still there, though in different areas from the settlement's first tobacco farms. Tobacco is now produced in more than half of Virginia's 98 counties, in fields occupying over 91,000 acres. The overall production puts tobacco in the leading place among Virginia's cash crops. Four different types of tobacco are grown in Virginia. These are:

- Flue-cured (Bright). Virginia's 1959 harvest was 106,500,000 pounds. This type, produced in six States, is known throughout the world as "Virginia." It is the chief ingredient of cigarettes manufactured in the United States and much of it is used in smoking tobaccos.
- Burley (light air-cured). Production in Virginia in 1959 was 21.4 million pounds. Grown in eight States, it is an important ingredient in cigarettes and in pipe tobaccos. Some of this type is suitable for snuff.
- Fire-cured. Virginia produced about 10.8 million pounds in 1959. This type, grown in three States, is the chief raw material of snuff. Some of it is utilized in twist chewing tobacco.

• Virginia "sun-cured" (dark air-cured). This is grown only in Virginia where nearly 2.5 million pounds was harvested in 1959. Its use is confined almost entirely to a form of plug chewing tobacco. Although the old term "sun-cured" is retained, in practice this class of tobacco is air-cured.

People make tobacco

The most labor-demanding of all field crops is tobacco. From seedbeds to harvests, from curing barns to grading leaf for auction sales, good tobacco depends very largely on the human factor: the hands, the eyes and the skill of men who understand the temperamental plant.

It takes the labor, and a hard, year-around labor, of 64,300 farm families apart from seasonal workers to produce Virginia's annual tobacco crops. Each year 200,000 to 250,000 men and women are at work during periods when extra help is required to bring tobacco in from the fields. There is a brief pause in the routines of work only when the cured leaves are being sold off auction floors.

The farmer goes to market

Sales by auction take place in 18 Virginia communities. The marketing seasons usually begin the last week in September and end late in February. There were, in the latest seasons, 74 warehouses that disposed of leaf from Virginia's tobacco farms. From the auction floors

the sold tobacco is trucked to the 26 rehandling plants and stemmeries in Virginia. Then, after being cleansed and initially processed, the hogsheads of leaf are transported to numerous storage sheds for the long sleep nature requires to mellow the leaf.

For the produce of their fields the tobacco farmers of Virginia received about $87 million in 1959. That represents 18.7 percent of the cash receipts from all farm commodities produced within the state in the same year. The percentage would be more than doubled when related only to cash crops rather than to all farm commodities.

Virginia leaf goes places

Much Virginia-grown tobacco is fed into the hoppers of machines in factories in the state. Some of it is exported. Foreign markets, chiefly the United Kingdom, West Germany and Australia, took an estimated 42.4 million pounds of Virginia flue-cured in 1959. An estimated 4.6 million pounds of Virginia fire-cured and sun-cured leaf, worth more than $3 million, went mainly to Norway, with lesser quantities to the United Kingdom, West Germany and elsewhere in the 1958-1959 period.

"Making" machines keep rolling

Leaf production, auction sales and exports, important as they are in the state's overall tobacco industry, do not represent the major commercial phases of Virginia's

tobacco economy. Those lie in the products of its factories and in retail sales.

More than 110 billion cigarettes were manufactured in 1959 by Virginia's seven factories, chiefly at Richmond. This total is but a part of the tobacco goods produced by these plants and a few others. The joint output, as recently reported, included 23,159,145 pounds of smoking tobacco, over 1 million pounds of chewing tobacco (most of it twist), and more than 125 million cigars.

A report for 1958 shows that the value of all tobacco goods manufactured in Virginia exceeded $1,122,000,000. This included the federal excise on all such commodities. Tobacco is first in the total value of products manufactured in Virginia, representing 30 percent of all nondurable goods produced in the State.

Out of a total of more than 27.5 billion cigarettes exported from the United States in 1958, nearly two-thirds were of Virginia manufacture. An additional near-3.5 billion tax-free cigarettes were shipped out from Virginia as "sea stores," a term that covers tobacco goods for sale to passengers afloat or aloft.

Machines are run by workers

Batteries of remarkable machines turn out 20 to 25 cigarettes a second, and modern factories have other labor-saving devices. Yet a good-size working force in Virginia is needed for tobacco manufacturing. Average employment in the state's tobacco factories exceeds

14,000 persons. Annual payroll has been in the range of $54 million. Some 7,000 workers are, additionally, in the category of seasonal employees.

The complex, modern tobacco factories, the stemmeries, rehandling plants and other units essential to the industry in the state represent a large capital investment. Real estate and personal property of tobacco manufacturers in Virginia are valued at $537 million. The latest report of new capital expenditures, which does not include plants under construction, totals $6,786,000.

Tobacco consumers and suppliers

Per capita consumption of cigarettes in Virginia is around 160 packages a year. There are 30,314 outlets in Virginia that supply tobacco goods directly to consumers. Two-thirds of these are in retail stores. Some 10,000 are represented by vending machines, armed services canteens, clubs and places other than stores. A recent trade report (1959) estimated the wholesale value of tobacco products distributed in the state at $109,565,514. Of this, cigarettes alone had a wholesale worth of $91,775,048, and cigars, $12,462,492. Pipe and chewing tobaccos, snuff, pipes and other smokers' articles accounted for over $5.3 million.

The revenue value of tobacco

Virginians were long free of a state tax on tobacco products though they paid a considerable share of the

The James River and Kanawha Canal, Richmond

federal excise on such goods. Included in these levies is the 8-cents-per-package tax on cigarettes. This excise, which has been increased a dozen times since its inception, began as a war measure in 1864. Other tobacco products were originally taxed in 1862. Through payments of the federal excise on manufactured tobacco, tobacco users in America have now contributed close to $39 billion to the national treasury in the past near-hundred years.

Beginning on August 1, 1960—and effective until June 30, 1962—cigarettes and cigars sold in Virginia are taxable items. The excise on each package of 20 cigarettes is 3 cents. Except for little cigars, which pay 1 cent for each 10 or fractional part, other cigars, and cheroots are taxed on retail value per thousand.

Other state and local revenues come from manufacturers of tobacco. These alone produced $4,662,000 in Virginia taxes in 1959. The tax yield is supplemented by firms associated with the tobacco industry in Virginia: transportation and storage services, auction warehouses, producers of machinery, packagings, filters and numerous other equipment and materials required by tobacco manufacturers.

The various aspects of the current tobacco industry in Virginia have now been briefly told. It is an important industry, the culmination of a slow development that began when Rolfe first sowed the seeds that saved Jamestown colony.

America's first industry begins

The three-and-a-half century record of tobacco in Virginia is by far the most dramatic portion of the plant's long history. In many parts of the world, the culture of tobacco became a routine industry almost from its inception. But in Virginia, particularly in the colonial period, tobacco was responsible for a good deal of excitement, of novel legislation, of a new social pattern and of a whole train of events, some of them sensational in their day.

Just what took place at the start of tobacco agriculture in England's first American mainland colony is hidden in historical obscurity. The men who settled Jamestown in May 1607 undoubtedly began to prepare for tobacco planting as soon as they possibly could. By 1609, cer-

tainly no later than 1610, they were shipping small quantities of imperfectly cured leaves of native tobacco to England.

The homeland represented a profitable market for tobacco but profits from the trade then lay entirely with Spanish exporters. They held a virtual monopoly of tobacco exports to England. The English market had, in the words of a modern wit, "begun through spontaneous combustion" in the late 1580's and had developed rapidly.

Excellent leaf from the West Indies, Venezuela and Mexico, roughly prepared in twisted rolls or other compact shapes called in England "pudding," "ball," "cane," was in great demand by affluent or extravagant English pipe smokers. The costs were high; by present-day standards they were fantastic. Records exist to show that prime tobacco was occasionally sold in the London market for the equivalent of $125 a pound. Ordinary varieties cost a sum that would be equal to $17.50 a pound. The expense of smoking was the chief reason why English pipes of the period had tiny bowls.

So rich an outlet for tobacco could hardly be ignored by English settlers in a land where the commodity in its natural state seemed readily available. But they did not have the tobacco. What they did grow or obtain from the Indians and send home was the shrubby little plant native to most of eastern North America. This was *Nicotiana rustica,* a tobacco which, as a contemporary wrote, was "biting, bitter, harsh." London merchants discouraged further importations of a tobacco that was unacceptable to smokers accustomed to "Spanish" leaf.

John Rolfe conducts a successful experiment

Through the ingenuity of John Rolfe, better known as the husband of Pocahontas than as America's first experimental agriculturist, seeds from the Spanish colonies of Venezuela and Trinidad were brought to Virginia, probably in 1611. How Rolfe managed this importation is a mystery. It would have been a violation of existing regulations for a Spanish colonial to sell or give seeds to the hated English. They must have been secretly acquired and brought to Virginia "on order" by some roving Dutch merchantman.

The secretary of Virginia, writing his records in 1614, made mention of the seeds brought in from Caracas and Trinidad. He praised Rolfe who "first took the pains to make trial (of the new seeds, in 1612) partly for the love he hath a long time borne (tobacco) and partly to raise commodity to the (settlers)."

Tobacco develops the colony of Virginia

The discovery that money crops of tobacco could be raised in the new settlement came just in time. Starvation, exhaustion, disease and general discouragement had caused the original colonists and newcomers to abandon the colony in 1610. They were persuaded by members of an incoming fleet, met as they were sailing away from Virginia, to try again. What gave the new

effort to colonize a practical base was Rolfe's experiment with "Spanish" seeds.

Probably all that Rolfe obtained were some small bags of seeds. Those were enough; there are over 350,000 tobacco seeds in an ounce. The tiny grains proved to be the richest treasure ever taken from Spain. Although the original planters in Virginia knew nothing about curing tobacco, the type planted in the sandy soil around Jamestown was clearly superior to the native tobacco. (Botanically, this tobacco of commerce is *Nicotiana Tabacum.*) Writers of the time in Virginia described it as "pleasant, sweet and strong." The prediction was confidently made that it would shortly be accepted as the "best tobacco under the sun."

It was not clear at first to anyone concerned with Virginia that the 1612 crop exported to England in 1613 was the beginning of a great industry. Even by 1616 the planters were able to send out only 2,500 pounds of the new leaf. Yet these shipments were the wedge that was to crack Spain's control of the English market. Quite apart from the excellent quality of Virginia leaf, that product had a further competitive advantage over the processed tobacco goods exported by Spanish colonies. Except for some experimental rolls made up in Virginia, leaf from the colony was sent in unmanufactured form. This was welcomed by English importers who frequently voiced suspicion of the contents of Spanish-colonial twists and rolls.

Virginia planters at first cured their leaf by throwing it on the ground in heaps as they did hay and letting it

ferment in the sun. Rolfe remarked, a few years after his first harvest, that his fellow settlers were uncertain how best to cure tobacco. In 1618 Governor Samuel Argall wrote to the Virginia Company of London that "Master (Thomas) Lambert has found out that Tobacco cures better on lines than in heaps and (he) desires that lines be sent." The resulting open-air and sun-curing of dark tobacco produced a milder-flavored leaf and was retained for many years. The dark air-cured (sun-cured) and aromatic fire-cured tobaccos of Virginia today are closest to the colonial type first grown at Jamestown. The Indians of Virginia had used a primitive method of fire-curing their tobacco.

Production is expanded

London importers soon made it clear that they would buy as much Virginia leaf as could then be produced. In consequence the colonists devoted themselves to the profitable new enterprise. The new industry had acquired the characteristics of a gold rush. Captain John Smith commented on the state in which he found the colony in 1617:

> *. . . but five or six houses, the church down, the palisades broken, the bridge in pieces, the marketplace and streets and all other spare places planted with tobacco, the colony dispersed all about, planting tobacco.*

That year Virginia planters exported about 20,000 pounds of leaf to the motherland. Within a dozen years or so exports were up to 1.5 million pounds. Thereafter,

up to the period of the American Revolution, reports of the quantities of tobacco shipped from Virginia show a steady advance except for a few years of crop failure.

Excessive concentration on a single crop and the exportation to England of leaf that was sometimes of poor quality resulted first in a 1619 law prohibiting the shipping of "trash" tobacco. A regulation in 1621 restricted each planter to harvesting only 9 leaves from each of 1,000 plants. This was intended to yield a net of 100 pounds. By various expedients planters learned how to evade these measures, which were frequently reaffirmed or revised.

Inspection warehouses were established in 1633 but control efforts were generally ineffective for a century. Such terms as market surplus, quotas, crop control, allotments, plowing under and others now familiar in current American agriculture were not used in 17th century Virginia. Similar conditions existed then; only the terms were different.

Leaf pays the bills

The colony's economic dependence on a single staple resulted in an imperfect barter system. Tobacco became a monetary basis for goods and services, and frequently replaced currency. The system was cumbersome and it was unsound owing to occasional fluctuations in the market value of tobacco. Yet, once tobacco had become established as the basic industry, its use as a circulating medium continued to be maintained throughout the colonial period. As a result, such intriguing items as

these appeared at various times in Virginia's history:

- Shipping charges for the brave young women "of good families" who came to Virginia in 1620 and 1621 as prospective wives to the planters were first 120 pounds of best leaf and later 150 pounds. "This payment to take precedence of all other debts."
- Salaries of clergymen became fixed at 16,000 pounds of tobacco leaf per annum. The fee for a marriage ceremony was 200 pounds of leaf; for a funeral service 400 pounds. "No man," stated a regulation of 1624, "was to dispose of his tobacco before the minister be satisfied."
- "A sufficient, good and wholesome meal" served in a tavern was to cost 10 pounds of tobacco; a gallon of "strong beer," 8 pounds. This was in 1644 and tobacco was then rated at 6 pence the pound for best leaf, 4 pence the pound for medium leaf.
- By a Parliamentary law of 1673 a tax of one penny the pound was chargeable on tobacco exported from Virginia or Maryland to another colony. Later, this was applied to the partial maintenance of the College of William and Mary.

Tobacco meets opposition

Quite apart from destructive elements in nature, agricultural inexperience, the carelessness of many planters

in making up crops for export, and occasional spoilage at sea, other conditions affected the initial development of Virginia's tobacco industry.

Britain's king James I demonstrated an almost fanatic opposition to the use of tobacco. The patent holders of Virginia, the London Company, worried about a "colony founded on smoke." From time to time the directors ordered successive governors to diversify the staple agriculture with the hope of curtailing, if not eliminating it altogether. Grave physicians issued solemn warnings, attributing all human ailments to smoking. There were, as well, opponents among economists and others to the colonial commerce in tobacco.

But the plant that poets and writers were calling "benevolent" and "divine" appeared to thrive on opposition. No one in Virginia seemed convinced that arguments on economic grounds were sound. The use of tobacco, too, was being severely opposed in some areas in that period in the mistaken notion that the plant was medicinal. Smokers generally rejected objections on the ground of health. They had long ago assured themselves, on the basis of solid, visible evidence, that there was no harm in temperate smoking.

The opposition, for the most part, had to accept the inevitable. For the European market expanded enormously in the 17th century, and throughout that area there was a growing demand for "Virginia" leaf. Exports that had totaled a few million pounds by the mid-1600's were in the 20 millions and more by the end of the century and in the range of 100 million before the Amer-

ican Revolution began. A great English merchant marine had, by 1685, come into existence to carry tobacco.

New fields for tobacco

After three or four plantings 17th century planters complained that their soil was "wore out." They began to move to newer, more fertile fields. As immigrants continued to arrive—there were around 40,000 persons in

Rolling tobacco to the warehouse

Virginia by 1671—the small tobacco planters left the tidewater for the adjacent west and south. This expansion of the colony's boundaries was long to continue.

Tobacco was soil-draining then, for such practices as crop rotation and the scientific use of fertilizers lay far in the future. This resulted in the condition—most conspicuous in the 18th century—of a large, scattered, shifting class of small planters in Virginia and a small, landed tobacco aristocracy.

Large, self-supporting estates had enough acreage to permit some fields to lie fallow while others produced tobacco. These estates ranged down in size from the estimated 300,000 acres owned by Robert ("King") Carter to holdings of 20,000 to 30,000 acres. Included in the group of large plantations was that of William Byrd of Westover, with 179,000 acres. Byrd, an expressive enthusiast about tobacco, made frequent contributions to the literature of the plant he described as "that bewitching vegetable."

The extent of acreage, however, did not necessarily control quality. The finest "sweet-scented" tobacco came from the small plantation of Edward Digges, a mid-17th century settler. His crops were grown on the gray, sandy soil near the York River close to Yorktown. The skills of a succession of cropmasters and the ideal "starved" soil resulted in the lightest, mildest leaf grown in Virginia. Casks in which this tobacco were shipped had a distinctive "E.D." stamp. For many years after his death, leaf from Digges' original farm, a product always referred to as "E Dees," brought the highest prices in the English market.

Market surplus – and remedies

The early Virginia leaf growers were frequently plagued by overproduction. Events generally regarded as disasters had, therefore, a contrary effect. Planters thought it a stroke of good fortune when, during the Second Dutch War, the entire tobacco fleet was captured and burned by the enemy. Tobacco farmers expressed equal satisfaction when, in the same period, the "mighty winds" of 1667 almost entirely destroyed the huge Virginia crop then ready for harvesting.

Lord Culpeper, the governor, commented in 1681:

> *. . . that which is more to us than all other things put together, and will be the speedy and certain ruin of the colony, is the low price of tobacco. The thing is so fatal and desperate that there is no remedy; the market is overstocked and every crop overstocks it more. It is commonly said that there is tobacco enough now in London to last all England for five years . . . Our thriving is our undoing . . .*

Sometimes desperate measures were taken to cure the menace of surplus. In 1682, for instance, growers who were enraged at the low price of tobacco, destroyed their own crops and those of hesitant neighbors. Various legislative expedients intended to aid the planters were frequently voided by Parliament, usually on behalf of "the planters' enemies," the London importers. For many years Virginia's chief agricultural industry went through periods of great instability.

The "Parson's Cause"

A legal dispute over tobacco, tried before a jury at Hanover, Virginia, was to have dramatic consequences. It brought sudden fame to a comparatively unknown local lawyer, Patrick Henry, then only 27, aroused public turmoil and provoked rebellious thoughts about royal interference with Virginia's right to independent action. It became known as the "Parson's Cause."

The salaries of Virginia clergymen had been established at a basic 16,000 pounds of tobacco annually, assessed on tithe payers. Owing to a drought, the Assembly had enacted in 1758 that debts and obligations payable in tobacco could be settled at the rate of two pence a pound. This "Two-Penny" Act was to be in force for one year. The clergy promptly petitioned the Privy Council at London for its abrogation. Their plea finally resulted in a royal veto.

A suit for damages against the tithe payers came to trial in 1763. The amount demanded was the difference between the two pence a pound paid to clergymen in 1758-1759 and the market value of tobacco in that period. The action was brought by a single parson—a test case that would affect the amount due the rest of the clergy.

The tithe payers had engaged Patrick Henry as defense counsel. His appeal to the jury was largely an emotional one. Among other thundering, inflammatory passages, he denounced the royal veto and denied that obedience was due a king who had shown himself a

tyrant. For the first time in his career he heard the cry of "treason!" But his oratory had won the jurors. They awarded the plaintiff exactly one penny damages—an old English custom in technical judgments. Their verdict was, in essence, a defiance of the king. Patrick Henry, whose eloquence seems to have carried him further than he had planned to go, became the popular hero of Virginia.

Virginia leaf and foreign creditors

Throughout the colonial period, in a good part of the world, the term "Virginia" meant the finest tobacco rather than a place. Before the middle of the 18th century, the curing methods of earlier periods were giving way to the use of open fires built on the floors of tightly closed barns. The directed heat brought leaves to a "proper" color.

So eagerly sought was Virginia leaf that it was accepted as valuable collateral in an important transaction during the War of American Independence. Through the efforts of the American commissioners at Paris, Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane, the French tobacco interests advanced a credit to the Continental Congress of 2 million *livres*. The loan was secured by 5 million pounds of Virginia's best tobacco—that from the York and James River districts.

The Revolutionary War had a disastrous effect on exports and, consequently, on most planters. Many of these, including such notables as Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, were already heavily in debt to British

importers and factors. "These debts," Jefferson commented,

> *had become hereditary from father to son, for many generations, so that the planters were a species of property, annexed to certain mercantile houses of London.*

About 2 million pounds sterling was then owing by Virginia planters. The Treaty of Paris allowed collection of these debts and a number of consequent law-suits brought ruin to wealthy Virginians. The situation aroused the interest of Congress and resulted in a special convention which, in 1802, fully settled for £600,000 all debts owing by Virginia planters to British merchants.

Competition brings changes

After the War of Independence, Virginia resumed her activities as a major leaf supplier to the Western world, despite some serious interruptions, among them the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars. Disturbing competition arose when European farmers turned to production of tobacco during the American war. The most important competition to Virginia was, however, not foreign. It came from new tobacco farms opening up rapidly in the virgin soils of Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri and elsewhere in western areas.

The use of snuff had diminished in the latter part of the 18th and the early 19th centuries. Smokers were expressing a marked preference for a lighter and brighter leaf for their pipes. Virginia planters adjusted themselves to the trend by learning how to cure leaf to an attractive

piebald or spangled appearance. These new types began to be called by their characteristic coloring and they brought the highest prices.

But the market value of shipping leaf still fluctuated. An unhappy legislator observing the current scene was quoted in the *Richmond Enquirer* for February 16, 1830. Unquestionably, his view of the situation was "gloomy":

> *. . . the prospect of the Virginia planters is gloomy in the extreme; he would repeat the expression, gloomy in the extreme. The low prices in the market afforded them but a gloomy prospect, indeed. Added to this picture is the fact, that the tobacco of Kentucky and Missouri in some markets has entirely supplanted, and in others is sufficiently rivalling that of Virginia which adds a shade to a picture already sufficiently gloomy.*

New fields and old routines

The gloom was somewhat dissipated by Virginia's exportations of leaf later in 1830. Out of the United States total of 105,000 hogsheads the largest quantity from any one area—45,000 hogsheads—was supplied by Virginia. The industry in Virginia still had its markets—and a good deal of resiliency.

A healthy reformation in the management of field and barn took place. New competition and low prices led to crop rotation and improved fertilizers, better harvesting and curing methods, greater care in packing tobacco. The result was a marked improvement in leaf quality.

This served to raise the price of some Virginia tobacco to high levels.

These developments accelerated a trend toward reduced acreages for tobacco. By the middle 19th century an average of six acres or less in farms of 50 to 500 acres was given over to tobacco. This was thought by cropmasters to be large enough areas to produce an annual average of 3,500 pounds of fine quality leaf.

Improved methods on the farm had not, however, appreciably reduced the time-consuming work of the farmer with the demanding, sensitive plant. One of Virginia's outstanding agriculturists, John Taylor of Caroline County, had commented on the farmers' lot:

> *It would startle even an old planter to see an exact account of the labour devoured by an acre of tobacco, and the preparation of the crop for market. He would be astonished to discover how often he had passed over the land, and the tobacco through his hands, in fallowing, hilling, cutting off hills, planting and replanting, toppings, succerings, weedings, cuttings, picking up, removing out of the ground by hand, hanging, striking, stripping, stemming, and prizing.*

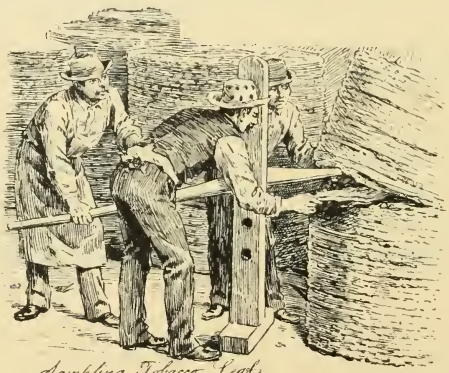
The break in selling traditions

Other notable changes, apart from modernized agricultural methods, were to have a profound effect on Virginia's tobacco industry. Selling leaf by auction at warehouses, for instance, began tentatively around 1810, apparently first at Lynchburg. Hogsheads brought to

the warehouses were broken open for leaf inspection by prospective buyers, thus adding the term "breaks" to the local language. (Even today, "break" denotes in some areas the start of a tobacco auction or warehouse sales.)

An Assembly Act of 1730—the first effective and the most important law relating to inspection of tobacco in the colonies—required that export leaf be brought to "rolling houses" in hogsheads and examined by inspectors. Warehouse receipts given to the consignor circulated as currency. These tobacco notes specified the amount of leaf in each hogshead, crop type and quality. The 1730 Act had been passed out of urgent necessity (though long delayed) to prevent the disposal of unsound tobacco. The element of quality was, therefore, of paramount importance.

The procedure of "breaks" was a defensive method for leaf buyers. They had become wary. Too many warehouse inspectors had grown careless or, at least, inefficient. As a consequence of the new marketing methods some inspectors unofficially became auctioneers and sometimes commission merchants. Danville became a center for warehouse auction sales of unprized tobacco



Sampling Tobacco Leaf

after the 1837 panic, and this form of selling spread.

Official hogshead inspections continued, however, to be the procedure in many markets and for some time. The growing practice of bringing loose leaf to authorized warehouses received legal sanction by the Virginia Code of 1849. Thereafter, inspectors were required to weigh and grade unprized tobacco. Improved methods of auctions were introduced. In the next few decades sales of loose leaf tobacco by auction had become fairly standardized in many areas. Within a short while after 1865, this marketing method was soundly established.

Unloading leaf *A tobacco "break" at Lynchburg*

Poor soil grows rich tobacco

Around the late 1820's it was found that the "poor, thin, useless, gray soils" of Pittsylvania and Halifax Counties and adjoining areas to the immediate south produced an attractive, light leaf of mild taste. Because

of its appearance when cured, it was locally known as "Bright" or "Yellow."

This type was first used chiefly for plug wrappers. Later it became the basic ingredient in the most popular of smoking tobaccos. Meanwhile, the previously undesirable farm land on which the new light leaf was grown, increased rapidly in value.

As its culture spread in the border counties of Virginia and North Carolina, charcoal, or charcoal and wood as fuels for drying leaf, began to be widely applied to this leaf type. From this local tobacco — grown in an area about 150 miles wide, the Old Belt — evolved the famed Bright leaf (flue-cured) tobacco of today.

Flue-curing is introduced

Of major importance in the evolution of modern Bright tobacco was the process of curing leaf by flue-conducted heat. Experimental use of flues began early in the 1800's. The practical Virginia farmers who devised the first crude flues were attempting to reduce the smoky odor of leaf, to curb fire hazards to barns and leaves, and to eliminate mildew which frequently affected leaf after curing. Flues conducted heat from fires built outside a tightly constructed barn and the raising or lowering of heat by the fire-tender dried the hanging leaves within the barn and brought them to the desired bright-yellow color.

In the early 1870's, tobacco cured by flues was bringing higher prices than that cured by barn floor fires. The swift spread of flue-curing later in the century was

spectacular. The Bureau of the Census remarked that the rapid expansion of Bright tobacco production was "one of the most abnormal developments in agriculture the world has ever known." Within a few decades, flue-cured tobacco became the leading type of the world.

Virginia becomes a manufacturing center

In the colonial period the only manufacturing of tobacco in Virginia had been the occasional and limited processing of leaves into twist on a few farms. After the American Revolution, a few snuff factories were established in the state. Fairly early in the national period, a number of manufacturers went into the production of plug and twist and the industry grew.

By 1840 Virginia was producing 41 percent of the nation's tobacco goods, and 56 percent by 1860. At that time Richmond had over 50 tobacco factories in competition with those at Petersburg and Lynchburg. The latter city was so heavily engaged in selling leaf and manufacturing it that it was known as "Tobacco City."

In the middle 1870's the Richmond firm of Allen & Ginter, sensing a trend, went into the production of cigarettes. They were the Virginia pioneers in the large-scale manufacture of cigarettes, an article then fairly new in the States. The firm rapidly acquired a high reputation for its cigarettes, advertised as containing "the brightest, most delicate flavored and highest cost Gold Leaf Tobacco grown in Virginia."

Ingenious advertising methods added to the fame of Virginia's first cigarette manufacturer. They included

framed, colored posters promoting various brands of smoking tobacco and "costing $100 each." These were, the firm proudly announced, pasted on the Great Wall of China, the Pyramids and other monuments in lands where English was not a native tongue. That may have been only a romantic fancy, but it captured public interest.

The feminine role in cigarette factories

Together with other cigarette manufacturers, Allen & Ginter had a social problem to meet. A good part of their factory staff was composed of young females. Cigarettes were still regarded as a foreign novelty and the employment of young, white women to roll them was, in some quarters, thought not quite proper.

These girls, who had been taught their art by imported Greek, Russian and Polish craftsmen, were earning $4.50 to $9 a week. Their wages depended upon production volume. Experts among them were wrapping shredded tobacco in paper, pasting the paper edges, and clipping the ends with shears at the rate of four or five a minute—about 15,000 to 18,000 in a full week.

A reporter from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper,* then a widely read periodical, visited Richmond cigarette plants in 1883. *Leslie's* man commented with pleasure on the nearly 500 girls in the Allen & Ginter factory who rolled cigarettes. They packed them dexterously, picking up 20 of the little rolls at a time without counting them. The girls were "intelligent and comely

Hand rollers and other workers in a Richmond cigarette factory

. . . they must go through a most thorough examination as to character and habits" (and) "they come from the most respected families in the city." A few years later a reporter from *Harper's Weekly* found 900 young women rolling cigarettes in the same plant and a larger number in the Richmond factory of the Kinney Tobacco Company.

The role of the machine

Rolling cigarettes by hand could not possibly continue to meet the growing consumer demand for the desirable novelty. Cigarette production in the States had been under 20 million in 1865; by 1881 it was over 500 million. A major manufacturer offered $75,000 for a practical cigarette-making machine. "Practical" was stressed. There were patented mechanisms for producing cigarettes available but they wheezed and stuttered under the strain of use.

A youthful genius, James Albert Bonsack of Bonsack's Station, a Roanoke County village, registered a cigarette-

rolling machine in 1880. He was about 21 at the time. His completed machine was in a freight yard at Lynchburg, awaiting delivery to Richmond, when it was destroyed by fire. A new model, built with funds received for his damage claim, was patented by the inventor in 1881.

Bonsack's making machine did not live up to expectations when installed in the sponsoring firm's factory. Three years later a copy of it was set up in the Duke factory at Durham, North Carolina. Aided by improvements made on the spot, Bonsack's machine soon was producing 120,000 good cigarettes a day, forty times the daily output of a good hand roller. Not long thereafter, this mechanical roller became standard equipment in Virginia's cigarette factories. In 1885 tax-paid cigarettes first passed the billion mark.

Brands for the burning

Production of Bright tobacco and of Burley had been expanding rapidly in areas outside of Virginia. Manufacturers began to set up their plants close to these sources of supply. By the middle of the 1880's, therefore, Virginia began to lose its dominant place as the center of tobacco manufacture. Yet its factories continued to produce large quantities of tobacco goods, other than cigars.

Consumer demand for almost all tobacco products continued to show solid growth. The expanding market brought in a host of small, energetic manufacturers,

many of them concentrating on a sales leader in smoking or chewing tobaccos for a local market. Together with the larger, well-established firms they were all under the necessity of creating brand names, preferably something new and novel, for their products.

There simply wasn't shelf room in retail outlets for more than a small part of the tobacco commodities then available. By the end of the century and for part of the first decade of the 20th century, there were more than 12,000 brands of plug, twist and fine-cut chewing tobaccos, over 7,000 smoking tobaccos, over 3,600 snuffs and 2000-odd cigarettes, cigarros and cheroots on the domestic market. Plagiarism of what seemed to be an appropriate brand name was the order of the day. But when the catalog of sensible names ran out, manufacturers no longer bothered to be sensible.

Perhaps under the influence of the classic query, "What's in a name?" various Virginia manufacturers invited consumers to try their chewing tobaccos under such labels as *Cockeye, No Trust, Little Worth, Blarney and Bluster, Jail Bird, Nonsense, Our Goat, They're After Me.*

The nomenclature of cigarette, cigarro or cheroot brands offered in Virginia, apart from many suitable names, often had only local significance or was facetious or plain dizzy. Trade registries included such choice items as *Good Enough, Little Masher, Old Rip, Buzz Saw* (also a chewing tobacco), *Sour Grapes* (a snuff and a chewing tobacco as well), *Garter Buckle* and *Moonshine* (both also snuffs, smoking, and chewing tobaccos).

The change in industry pattern

As the tobacco industry in America became concentrated in fewer, bigger and more efficient companies, as expensive new machinery became an essential of plant equipment for mass production, and as advertising began to assume great importance in brand promotion, many manufacturers sold out or closed shop. The swollen catalog of brand names became smaller year by year as labels were retired to company files and the archives of the Patent Office.

When World War I began, the production of tax-paid cigarettes in the States was well past the 16 billion mark. Virginia's factories supplied a considerable share of this total. The industry was fairly standardized by then. Its commercial pattern, very much as it is today, became soundly established in the immediate post-war period.

Throughout the early period of America, Virginia was the cornucopia of tobacco production. After the Commonwealth had been well established the horn of plenty took on a new, dynamic aspect, an essential adaptation in the mechanical age. Virginia remained a forerunner and, in a broadened field, led the way to the large-scale manufacturing of the 20th century.

In 1962 the first of America's great industries will commemorate a continuity of 350 years. The development of the tobacco industry in that long period cannot be separated from the history of Virginia. The contribution of the Old Dominion, as English colony and as a State of the Union, has been of enormous consequence and will remain unique.

Data on various phases of the current tobacco industry in Virginia have been supplied by the Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Labor and Industry, the Department of Conservation and Economic Development, the Cooperative Crop Reporting Service, and the Department of Taxation, all of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Other data have been derived from publications of the Tobacco Tax Council (Richmond, Virginia), of the Internal Revenue Service, and from "Report on . . . Tobacco," J. B. Killebrew and "Statistics of Tobacco," J. R. Dodge, both in *Report on the Productions of Agriculture*, Tenth Census, 1880 (1883).

Works that provided information on various divisions of Virginia's tobacco history were *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860*, A. O. Craven (University of Illinois Studies, XIII, no. 1, 1926); *The Mighty Leaf*, J. E. Brooks, (1952); *The Story of Tobacco in America*, J. C. Robert (1949); and *The Bright-Tobacco Industry*, Nannie M. Tilley (1948).

The passage quoted on page 12 is from John Smith, *The General Historie of Virginia* (1625); those on page 14 are from Brooks, *The Mighty Leaf;* Lord Culpeper's comment on page 18 is from the *Calendar of State Papers* (1860); Jefferson's statement on page 21 appears in Robert, *Story;* the quotation from the *Richmond Enquirer* on page 22 occurs in Robert, *The Tobacco Kingdom* (1938); Taylor's opinion on page 23 was printed in *Arator* (Baltimore, 1814) and republished in Craven, *Soil Exhaustion;* The Census Bureau statement on page 27 comes from Robert, *Story* and the quotation on pages 28-29 from *Leslie's* appeared in the issue of February 10, 1883.

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